

media

A Spy for Soviet Heads Home, Still Man of Mystery

By STAN CARTER

A convicted Soviet spy whose real identity is in dispute passed through New York yesterday on his way to what he said is his home in East Germany in a complicated swap involving four governments.

Leaving the Lewisburg, Pa., federal penitentiary earlier in the day after serving 13 years of a 30-year sentence for passing secrets to the Soviet Union, the former Long Island fuel-oil dealer known as Robert Gleen Thompson refused to disclose his real name.

He also declined to confirm reports that he really was a major in the Soviet KGB secret police. But he said that he had been born in Leipzig, East Germany, and is "a citizen of the German Democratic Republic." His father was Russian and his mother German, he said.

Describing espionage as "serious business," he said: "If I had to do it over again, I'd have to do it again. This was my job . . . I wouldn't change a day in my life, but I'm glad to be out."

"100% American"

When FBI agents arrested Thompson at his home in Bay Shore, L.I., on Jan. 7, 1965, he protested his innocence and contended that he was "100% American." Later, he changed his plea to guilty and told in a series of newspaper and magazine interviews of having passed relatively unimportant intelligence information to the Soviets first while serving as a clerk with U.S. Air Force intelligence in Berlin and later as a civilian in the New York area.

He continued to insist, however, that he was a native-born American.

"I was born in Detroit, Mich., the first child of Robert and Bernice Thompson," he said in a two-part article in the Saturday Evening Post entitled, "I Spied for the Russians."

"I'm sorry for what I've done," he said then. . . . I have tried to make amends. I told the FBI a lot of things that helped them. The Soviets aren't going to like that, and sooner or later they are going to try to get me. Not right now, for I'm too hot. But later on. Maybe even while I'm in prison."

But Thompson, who would be 43 if

he really was the man whose life he lived for at least 20 years, indicated no worries yesterday about his future. Reporters who covered his departure from the Lewisburg prison described him as tall and heavyset, with some teeth missing, bearded and gray-haired — "and obviously euphoric."

"You see how that sun's shining today," Thompson said. "That's how I feel . . . I want to thank all the people that were involved in helping me get my freedom and I just want to go home and be at peace with the world."

Accompanied by officials of the Federal Probation Service, Thompson was driven to Kennedy Airport for a flight to Berlin. He sat in the back of an automobile with about 400 paintings — most of them landscapes — that he painted in prison.

He's Thirsty

He said he considers himself retired from the spy business and anxious to go home to have his "first beer in 13 years and perhaps see my first woman."

East German attorney Wolfgang Vogel, who played a major role in arranging the prison exchange, was reported to have flown to West Germany on the same commercial airliner as Thompson.

Thompson's release is to be followed by the release from an East Berlin prison of Alan Van Norman, 23, of Windsor, Minn., an American student who was sentenced to a 2½-year term by the East Germans in February 1977 for trying to smuggle a doctor, his wife and his son to the West.

In the first step of the three-part exchange, Miron Marcus, 24, an Israeli businessman, was released from Mozambique last week after being imprisoned for 19 months after his small plane was forced down.

Rep. Benjamin A. Gilman (R.N.Y.) and a constituent, Rabbi Ronald Greenwald of Monsey, N.Y., played key roles in arranging the three-way swap at the request of Samuel Platto-Sharon, a member of the Israeli Knesset who wanted to help Marcus.

Gilman sought Vogel's help. The East German lawyer first became prominent by arranging the exchange of downed American U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers for Soviet master spy Rudolf Abel in Berlin in 1962. Since then, he has been involved in a series of spy exchanges. He also is the channel through which East German prisoners are released to West Germany for as much as \$20,000 a person.

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